

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

November 1, 2007

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Madison, Wisconsin -- Erik C. Peterson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Victoria Biks, age 45, and Marjorie Venturella, age 70, both of Radisson, Wis., were each sentenced today by U.S. District Judge John Shabaz to 24 months in prison, to be followed by three years of supervised release. Judge Shabaz also ordered the defendants to pay restitution of \$391,740. In addition, the judge entered a criminal forfeiture money judgement against both defendants in the amount of \$114,313. Judge Shabaz staggered the prison sentences and ordered Biks to report to prison on December 1, 2007. Defendant Venturella was ordered to report to prison when Biks is finished serving her 24-month sentence.

On August 1, 2007, both defendants pleaded guilty to mail fraud. Biks and Venturella unlawfully obtained public benefits from various government agencies by making false statements and material omissions. The agencies involved included the Social Security Administration, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Sawyer County Health and Human Services, and the Sawyer County Circuit Court. The public benefits involved Supplemental Security Income benefits, State Supplemental Security Income benefits, Medicaid benefits, health care benefits from

Sawyer County Health and Human Services, and legal guardianship services from the Sawyer County Circuit Court.

At the sentencing hearing, the Court found the loss attributable to the fraud on the public agencies totaled \$282,049. The Court also found the defendants caused a loss of \$109,691 relating to a second scheme to defraud involving Cook County (Ill.) Circuit Court, which was managing the estate and assets of PV. Biks and Venturella were involved in that estate proceeding as PV's legal guardians.

In its sentencing memorandum to the Court, the government noted the defendants' criminal conduct included the following:

(1) Multiple false filings under oath to the Social Security Administration claiming that PV did not have any assets.

(2) Multiple false statements and filings with Sawyer County HHS claiming PV was indigent and had no assets, thereby requiring federal, state, and local public assistance.

(3) Multiple false statements and omissions in their petitions to the Cook County Circuit Court, including:

(a) Lies about needing \$136/month for Ensure to feed PV after a gastric tube was inserted in his stomach.

(b) Lies about needing PV's care and maintenance payments increased from \$2,500 per month to \$2,800 per month in 1993; and again from \$2,800 per month to \$3,000 per month in 1999. PV's expenses were already being covered by federal SSI,

state SSI and Medicaid. Thus, there was no reason to increase the care and maintenance payments.

(c) Lies about needing and using \$30,000 to remodel the home bathroom to make it handicap accessible for PV.

(d) Lies about needing \$7,950 to pay Marge Venturella's VISA bill because it was an accumulation of three years of items for PV.

(e) Lies about needing \$15,768 to put in a paved driveway and new roof on the house. Marge Venturella submitted inflated quotes from her son-in-law (Jon Snell) and never informed the court of this fact. Then, when the real contractor came in with a lower bid, Venturella told him to inflate the cost. He did, and kicked back the difference to Venturella. The driveway was never paved, and metal sheets were simply put on the roof of the home.

(4) Multiple false statements and omissions in their filings with the Sawyer County Circuit Court, including:

(a) Lies to Sawyer County HHS telling them there was no guardian or estate for PV. Based on these false statements, Sawyer County HHS petitioned the Sawyer County Circuit Court to create a guardianship for PV in 2000.

(b) Lies in the initial filing with Sawyer County Circuit Judge Yackel. Defendant Biks submitted a sworn pleading to the court indicating that PV had no assets.

(c) Lies in the annual filings with the court. Biks submitted annual

accountings in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 to Judge Yackel claiming PV had zero assets each year. In fact, his estate had over \$600,000 in every one of those years.

The charges against Biks and Venturella are the result of an investigation conducted by the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, the Sawyer County Sheriff's Office, and the Sawyer County Health and Human Services Department. Prosecution of this case has been assigned to Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel J. Graber.

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